

# *Markham Regional Arboretum Society: The First 25 Years—A History*

*by  
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In preparing this history,  
we have used the archives in the MRAS offices, recollections  
of those who have been involved in the leadership over the years,  
and our own personal notes.  
We assume that there are errors and omissions  
and for these we are truly sorry.

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Edited and designed by Diane Goldsmith



## *Land Is Acquired to Form Concord Nature Park*

Three properties that were incorporated into what was originally called the Concord Nature Park were purchased by the City of Concord during the years 1963–1980. The first purchase in 1963 was the Hesse residence and 2–3 acres of land fronting on Cowell Road in the southwest corner of the future park. The Hesse residence became the Science Center, which has been used as an environmental studies classroom for students from Mt. Diablo School District.

In 1966 the City acted on an offer by Bea and Ira Markham and bought their home and 12 acres of land, which adjoined the Hesse property on the east. The land would be included in a Nature Park and the Markhams would remain in residence as long as they wished. Markham's original plantings were augmented by the City following recommendations made by Bea Markham, in consultation with City Parks personnel. Bea died in 1979 and Ira remarried. He and his new wife, Birdice, left the property and moved to Utah in 1983. Because of flooding, termites, and vandalism, the house was demolished in 2001.

The final acquisition, the Backstrom residence and land located east of La Vista Avenue on the north edge of the park, was made in 1980.

The park now totaled 16 acres. A Garden Center and Nursery area were developed on the Backstrom land and the house was remodeled to include a meeting area and office for park employees.



# *Markham Arboretum Society Formed*

The Concord Trees Committee was composed of members appointed by the City Council. Their charge was to give advice to the City concerning design, planting, etc. in city parks and along city streets. One of their areas of interest was the Concord Nature Park. In October of 1975, the committee proposed changing the name of the Concord Nature Park to Markham Arboretum, believing that the name Park conveyed an impression of an area with playgrounds, picnic tables, etc, clearly not the use intended for this area.

The park/arboretum received more and more attention from the committee into the late 1970s. At the December 1980 meeting it was decided that the January 1981 meeting would be held at the Orville and Phyllis Wanamaker residence and would be “a joint meeting with the Concord Garden Club’s Civic Beautification Committee to hear from Evelyn Bell on how to go about forming an Arboretum Society with a non-profit status.”

In February 1981 a joint committee of the Concord Garden Club and Arboretum Society Committee was held “to plan the first meeting of the Markham Arboretum Society.” A By-laws Committee composed of Karen Mahshi, Donald Rose, Connie Bishop, and Phyllis Wanamaker was charged with drawing up by-laws to be presented at the first meeting of the Society on March 5, 1981. The first meeting was attended by “approximately” twelve persons.

Mai Arbegast was commissioned to develop a Master Plan for the Arboretum (excluding the Backstrom property). The plan was presented to the Concord City Council on November 9, 1981 and to the Community Services Committee on the following Day.



At an Executive Board meeting in January 5, 1982, it was announced that non-profit status had been obtained from the State and the Society's by-laws had been approved by the Secretary of State. At that meeting it was also reported that an agreement with the City of Concord had been reached for working out a contract between the City and The Society. In 1996, the Society's name was officially changed to Markham Regional Arboretum Society. The name change reflected the Society's mission to include plants that would grow in the region, extending over the greater Bay Area and not just in Concord.

**Mission Statement:**

**To partner with the City of Concord, in developing the Markham Nature Park and Arboretum into a unique educational sanctuary for the demonstration, collection, and preservation of trees and other plants, which are adaptable to the inland, maritime influenced, Northern California region.**



# *Garden Center and Nursery Are Developed*

The Backstrom house was converted to a meeting room and office for the Society and an office for Concord Park employees in 1983. From 1991 to 1992, with monetary and volunteer help from Lutheran Brotherhood, various projects were completed on the grounds surrounding the house—including an arbor, raised planter beds, and patio paving.

In order for the house to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act standards, extensive remodeling of the house was completed by the City of Concord in 2004.





The house and raised beds and patio areas are known as the Garden Center.

Adjacent to the Garden Center is the Plant Nursery. A fiberglass greenhouse was purchased for the Nursery in 1988. In that same year, the City fenced the Garden Center and Nursery area to protect Society and City property. Raised planter beds were installed by the Telephone Pioneers in 1990. More beds were added later. Compost bins, soil bins, and a tool shed were constructed in 1993. Greenhouse capacity was increased in 1999 by the construction of two poly-houses. A second storage shed purchase was originally used by the Herb Associates.

Boy Scouts of America Eagle Scout projects remodeled the soil bin and tool shed and constructed potting benches and display stands for the Nursery.





# *The Galindo Creek Restoration Project in Markham Nature Park*

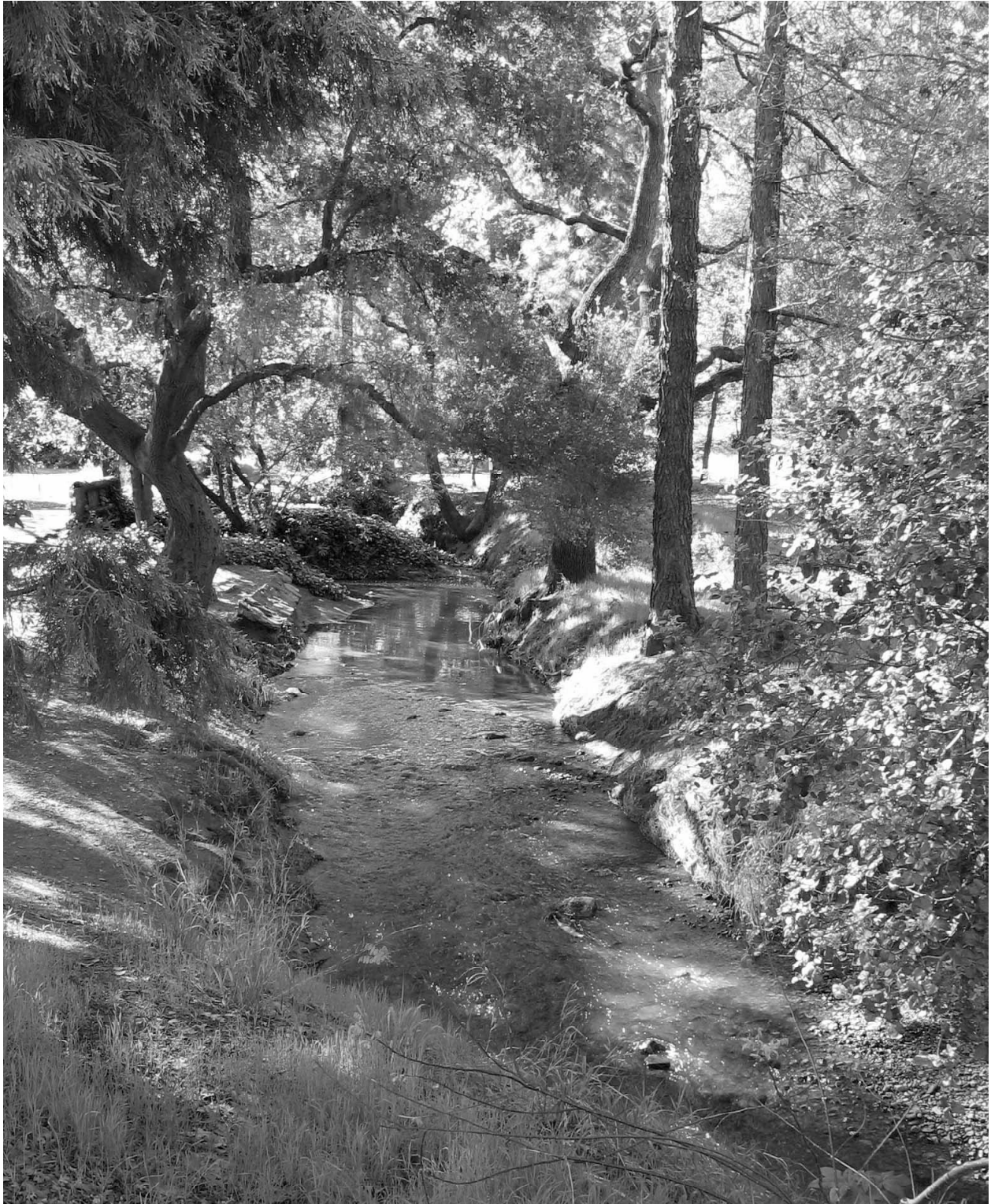
The three-phase restoration of Galindo Creek in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a joint project of the Markham Arboretum Society and the City of Concord. Financial aid in the form of three grants totaling \$45,000 was supplied by the State Department of Water Resources—Urban Streams Restoration Project. The grants were matched by financial and labor contributions from the City and the Society.

Phase I was managed by Bruce Chamberlin and employed the services of H.T. Harvey and Associates as ecological consultants. The consultants mapped the creek through the Park and made specific recommendations for restoration work. Work was finalized in the summer of 1989 with the construction of a gabion wall immediately downstream from the Science Center bridge. The gabion wall stabilized the bank and prevented further erosion at the site.

Phase II was managed by Rod Huppi and used the services of Steve Chatham of Prunuske/Chatham as a consultant. This phase re-established an old meander of the creek as a winter flood overflow channel, and also repaired the stream bank opposite the Science Center. These repairs were highlighted as urgently needed during the Phase I study and were accomplished during the summer and fall of 1990 and 1991.

Phase III was managed by Byron Feldhake in 1995 and again received consulting advice from Steve Chatham. Problems with creek erosion in the upstream area of the Park had been recognized during the Phase I study and Phase III corrected these problems. A final report was

prepared for each phase of the project and copies of these were submitted to the State Department of Water Resources, the City of Concord, and the Board of the Markham Arboretum Society.





# *The International Garden*



Work on the future International Garden began in 1987 when the Markham Arboretum Society Board retained Karen Mahshi to prepare conceptual drawings of the entire park. The completed drawings were exhibited in the City Council Chambers in 1989 and were helpful in starting the long process to prepare detailed construction drawings. Karen Mahshi also performed this work. These lead to the subsequent awarding of contracts in 1994 to do the hardscape.



The work entailed the removal of most of the old trees at the site, building soil berms on the north and south margins, building masonry walls in front of the berms, and providing a system of crushed granite walks within the International Garden. The contractor also paved the parking area, built a concrete post-and-rail fence around the periphery, and poured a pad for a future pavilion. The hardscape was finished in 1995.

Some tree planting was done in 1996 and “pop-up” sprinklers were installed in the future turf areas around the pavilion pad in 1997. The next year saw major volunteer efforts in augering tree holes and assisting City Parks personnel in planting more than fifty trees. Purchase of these trees was made possible by a grant from Project Releaf. The xeriscape in front of the International Garden was planted in 2000. Turf was installed in the eastern portion of the International Garden in the following year.

The South African Garden was planted in the spring of 2002 and was in full bloom for the dedication of the Bud Hansen Wisteria Arbor in June of 2002. People were invited to make a donation in honor of a loved one and an engraved brick was installed in the floor of the arbor. The donations helped to fund the building of the structure. The Rotary Club of Concord and Boston Properties each made significant donations to complete the arbor. Following the dedication, the International Garden was opened to the public.

In 2004, the City and the developer of the five new home sites bordering the north side of the Garden arranged for a contractor to install a sprinkler system in the Australia/New Zealand Garden. The installation was followed by the planting of trees and shrubs. Sprinkler installation on the south berm in 2004 and 2005 allowed the planting of many trees and shrubs in the California/Southwest and in the Eastern United States Gardens.



The remaining sections of the International Garden are in the planning stages and await the installation of irrigation systems before they can be planted.

**Some views of the International Garden:**

**(Top left) The Bud Hansen Wisteria Arbor in 2006**

**(Top right) Looking west from the South African Garden**

**(Bottom right) A view of the Australia / New Zealand Garden on the north side of the International Garden where it borders a new development of homes**